

FIFTEENTH

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

DIRECTORS AND PHYSICIAN

OF

JAMES MURRAY'S

ROYAL ASYLUM FOR LUNATICS.

JUNE 1842.

PERTH:

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THE present is the Fifteenth Annual Report of this Asylum. Few Institutions, it is believed, have been more steadily successful than the present, when it is regarded, not in reference to the number of its permanent inmates, but the number of cures which it has effected. Since the Asylum was first opened, to the present date, 478 patients in all have been admitted. During the same period there have been dismissed cured 195 ; and 88 have been removed by their friends more or less improved ; so that the benefit which it has conferred on the community, by extending relief to a wide range of its suffering and unfortunate members, is considerable.

During the year which has now elapsed there have been admitted into the Institution 30 patients, viz.,—13 males and 17 females. In the course of the year 17 have been cured—8 males and 9 females ; 5 have been removed by their friends more or less recovered—3 males and 2 females ; while 5 have died. In reference to the patients who died, it may be proper to mention that they were all worn out by the long continuance of the malady. Four of them had no specific disease, but sunk

entirely from exhaustion, and one of them came into the House with fever, and died of it on the fifth day after admission.

It has sometimes occurred to the Directors, whether there was any propriety in annually publishing a Report of their proceedings, seeing that for the last fourteen years they have continued to do so, and may be expected during these years to have communicated everything worth knowing or of use on the subject of insanity. A slight consideration, however, has satisfied them that it would not be proper to discontinue the practice ; for, although it is doubtless true that in the general routine and management of the Asylum there is a great uniformity of system,—so that when it is once described and explained, little that is new can be told ;—yet, in an Institution containing permanently about 140 patients, it were erroneous to say that something both new and interesting is not likely to occur in the course of a whole year worthy of being recorded in their proceedings, and of being communicated to the public. They consider that it is from the publication of the Reports of this and similar Institutions that useful information as to the treatment and cure of insanity can best be obtained ; and therefore the Directors continue their former practice in accordance with that adopted by similar Institutions in the country.

The subject of insanity has only of late years begun to receive that share of attention from medical and other scientific persons which its importance merits. The amount of ignorance which generally prevailed on the subject until a comparatively recent date can only be understood by those who will take the trouble to consult the works of some of our most celebrated authors, written several years subsequent to the commencement of the present century. As an illustration, it is only necessary to quote one passage from a celebrated work,* published thirty-nine years ago :—“ Both reason and experience shew the

* Edinb. Practice of Physic, &c., vol. ii, p. 455.

necessity of confining such as are deprived of their senses ; and no small share of the management consists in hindering any hurt to themselves or mischief to other persons. It has sometimes been usual to chain and to beat them ; but this is both cruel and absurd, since the contrivance called the *strait waistcoat* answers every purpose of restraining the patients without hurting them." It thus appears, that at that period there was no alternative between beating and chains, but the strait waistcoat—an article of dress which has never been used in this Institution, from a decided conviction that it was highly injurious to the patients. More modern practice has shewn that, in too many instances, these mechanical means of restraint were too often resorted to from a dread of the insane, or from a wish to save trouble to the attendants in whose care they were left, and who applied them either from caprice or laziness as they pleased. The Physician has seen no reason to change his opinion of the limited employment of mechanical means of coercion, properly regulated by the heads of the department ; and at no period in the history of this Institution were the instruments left in the power or the option of the keepers. This subject having been so often discussed in the Annual Reports, the Directors consider it unnecessary to enter more fully into it again.

The Directors have repeatedly taken occasion, in their Reports, to insist on the advantage to the insane of an early removal to an Asylum. The experience of the Physician has made him fully alive to the great importance of this point, and the serious evils which frequently attend the neglect of it. Another allusion to it here may, therefore, not be misplaced : Out of the 17 patients cured during last year, *ten* of the recoveries occurred in recent cases ; and all of them in cases which could not be called old. Let the friends and relations of the insane, therefore, be assured, that in insanity, as in other diseases, an early application for aid and advice is the surest and likeliest way of counteracting and curing the malady.

The Directors will not now give a tiresome repetition of the nature of the cases of the patients presently in the Institution, and which are as various as heretofore. There are individuals labouring under the highest mental excitement, while others are sunk to the lowest depths of despondency. One individual of the latter description is so bent on self-destruction that he has refused to taste food since his admission into the Asylum ; and it has consequently become the irksome duty of the House-Surgeon daily to convey food, in the shape of strong soup, into his stomach by means of the stomach-pump, as the only means of preserving his life. But for the care thus bestowed, and which has continued for many months, this poor man must, ere now, have sunk into the grave.

In former Reports, allusion has been made to the causes which generally predispose to, or produce, insanity ; and the Directors consider it their duty whenever such causes can clearly be discovered to point them out as so many beacons to warn others from incurring similar dangers. It has often been noticed by writers on insanity, that a great proportion of the cases of mental derangement has been excited by religious fear, and by mistaken and perverted notions of the Gospel scheme. The Directors are sorry to think that the experience of this Institution rather tends to confirm the truth of this observation. One woman, lately admitted into the Asylum, affords a distressing illustration of this. The patient referred to became a victim to that most deplorable of all forms of insanity, in which the patient entertains the belief of eternal rejection from Divine favour, and dwells unceasingly on this one gloomy and overpowering idea. The relations of those persons who are predisposed, by constitutional temperament or otherwise, to take such dark and gloomy views of their state, as that now referred to, ought to be careful of the kind of influences to which they allow them to be exposed.

There is a subject closely allied to the above which it may

not be improper to notice here, namely, a species of hypochondria under which the person affected loses a relish for his wonted amusements, however harmless,—shuns, as much as possible, mixing with society,—and pants for retirement from the world. Some are naturally of a retiring disposition, and seem only in their element when living in solitude. Others, again, find the chief sources of their happiness by mixing in society, and actively discharging the relative duties of life. When a person of the latter class suddenly meditates retirement and a relinquishment of his former habits of life, it not unfrequently indicates the commencement of hypochondria, which again settles down into insanity. Where the symptoms referred to make their appearance, every exertion should be made to counteract them. The observations of one who knew human character well, Sir James M'Intosh, are worthy of notice in connection with this subject. “Never indulge it,” (the wish to retire from active life) says that writer, “it is the most fatal of all delusions—the sad delusion by which Cowper was wrecked. Our happiness depends not upon torpor nor upon sentimentality, but upon the due exercise of our various faculties; it is not acquired by sighing for wretchedness and shunning the wretched, but by vigorously discharging our duty to society. Remember what Bacon says, that ‘in this theatre of man’s life, God and angels only should be lookers-on.’ . . . If Cowper had attended to Bacon’s admonition, that ‘torpid minds cannot engage too soon in active life, but that sensibility should stand back until it has passed the meridian of years,’ instead of being ‘one of the most wretched, he might have been one of the most happy of men.’ ”

The Directors and Physician must now conclude this Report. They have already stated that the Institution continues to prosper. It has been visited, from time to time, by strangers of considerable eminence, many of whom possessed experience of the working of similar Institutions; and, so far as the Direc-

tors have ever heard, the persons referred to uniformly awarded their meed of approbation to this Asylum. The Directors would only trust that, under Divine Providence, the Institution may be long continued as a blessing to the community.

The Directors, in conclusion, have to express their thanks to the Physician, as well as to the House-Surgeon, for their unremitting attention to their important duties, and their unqualified approbation of the conduct of the Superintendent and Matron.

TABLE FIRST.

	Males.	Females.	Total.
Number of Patients remaining in the Asylum on 12th June, 1841, stated in last Report at 75 Males and 66 Females, and in all 141 ; but should have been....	73	65	138
Number admitted from 12th June, 1841, to 13th June, 1842,	13	17	30

TABLE SECOND.

	Males.	Females.	Total.
Cured from 12th June, 1841, to 12th June, 1842,	8	9	17
Removed by their friends,.....	3	2	5
Died,	0	5	5
Remaining 13th June, 1842,	78	63	141